

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-10 OMB-01 ACDA-05 MC-02 L-02

PM-03 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07

NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 CAB-02 COME-00 DOTE-00

EB-07 FAA-00 AID-05 TRSE-00 /093 W
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P R 211818Z MAR 75

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7759

INFO AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU

AMEMBASSY BAMAKO

AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 07258

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, PFOR, EAIR, UV, FR

SUBJECT: MALI-UPPER VOLTA BORDER DISPUTE: ARMS AIRLIFT

REF: STATE 062512

1. ON MARCH 21 WE RAISED WITH QUAI DIRECTOR FOR AFRICA REBEYROL THE SEEMING INCONSISTENCY BETWEEN PREVIOUS QUAI DESCRIPTIONS OF FRENCH POLICY IN THE MALI-UPPER VOLTA BORDER DISPUTE AND THE SHIPMENT OF ARMORED CARS AND AMMUNITION REPORTED IN REFTEL. ADMITTING THE INCONSISTENCY, REBEYROL SAID THAT AFTER A LONG DELAY, MUCH GNASHING OF TEETH, AND A FINAL DECISION TAKEN SUBSEQUENT TO THE BANGUI CONFERENCE BY PRESIDENT GISCARD HIMSELF, FRANCE AGREED TO DELIVER A "SMALL QUANTITY" OF ARMS TO UPPER VOLTA. THE DECISION TO SUPPLY A SMALL NUMBER (UNDER 10) OF MACHINE GUN-CARRYING ARMORED CARS (AUTO-MITRAILLEUSES) AND AMMUNITION FOR ARMS THE VOLTANS
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ALREADY POSSESS WAS MADE IN ORDER TO COUNTER VOLTAN

CHARGES THAT FRANCE HAD LEFT THE COUNTRY UNARMED. REBEYROL SAID THAT THE LIMITED ARMS THE FRENCH AGREED TO SUPPLY WOULD HAVE A PURELY PSYCHOLOGICAL AND NO MILITARY EFFECT AND ASSERTED THAT THE ARMS IMBALANCE IN MALI'S FAVOR HAS NOT BEEN CHANGED BY THE FRENCH DECISION. THE QUAI MAINTAINS ITS VIEW THAT IF SUBSTANTIAL QUANTITIES OF ARMS WERE TO GO TO UPPER VOLTA, MALI WOULD FIND THE EXCUSE SOME OF ITS MILITARY ARE SEEKING TO RENEW ITS ATTACKS. HENCE, SAID REBEYROL, THE FRENCH CONSIDER THAT THEIR EARLIER DECISION TO EMBARGO ARMS SHIPMENTS HAS NOT BASICALLY BEEN CHANGED AND THAT THE CARS AND AMMUNITION TO BE SUPPLIED IN APRIL ARE MERELY A "GESTURE".

2. REBEYROL WELCOMED THE AMERICAN (AND GERMAN) DECISION TO EMBARGO ARMS SHIPMENTS. HE EMPHASIZED THE VERY DIFFICULT PROBLEM WITH WHICH FRANCE HAD BEEN FACED IN TRYING, ON THE ONE HAND, TO EMBARGO ARMS SHIPMENTS TO UPPER VOLTA AND, ON THE OTHER, TO RETAIN THE NECESSARY CREDIBILITY IN VOLTAN GOVERNMENT EYES.

3. COMMENTING ON THE DISPUTE ITSELF, REBEYROL SAID HE WAS HOPEFUL THE MEDIATION COMMISSION WOULD FIND A WAY TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM BY ACCEPTING MOST VOLTAN TERRITORIAL CLAIMS WHILE ALLOWING A FEW VILLAGES TO REVERT TO MALI, THUS SAVING THE LATTER'S FACE. HE SAID HE DOUBTED THE SITUATION WOULD DETERIORATE TO THE POINT WHERE THE VOLTANS WOULD TRY TO USE ARMS TO RECONQUER LOST TERRITORIES BEFORE THE RAINY SEASON, ALTHOUGH SUCH A POSSIBILITY COULD NOT, OF COURSE, BE EXCLUDED.

4. COMMENT: WE HAVE NO REASON TO QUESTION THE GENUINENESS OF REBEYROL'S EXPLANATION AND BELIEVE THAT THE IMPORTANCE OF FRANCE'S MAINTAINING ITS CREDIBILITY WITH UPPER VOLTA PROVIDES AMPLE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE LIMITED ARMS SHIPMENTS THE FRENCH ARE EVIDENTLY CONTEMPLATING. RUSH

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